

lighter shade of blue by xxcaribbean

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Summary:

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The window to his studio overlooks the whole of New York, and Steve doesn't miss the way the wind curls into the room like smoke, thick and heavy from air polluted by busy streets and the life of people.

There's sirens in the distance and the honking of late cars – they're always there in a place like this, too loud when he'd moved in, but a comfort that lets him know the world still spins. Steve might even hear the distant rattle of voices on a warm, breezy day if the flat wasn't several stories above floor level.

Deeply, he breathes, inhales air and fresh paint. His fingers are stained blue and green, crust under his fingernails from the hours he's spent in his studio trying to transfer the images from his head onto a canvas. Soft strums of music fill the room, too, mostly drowned out by city life, but the distinct violin and flute are pitch perfect alongside the orchestra he loves to listen it for concentration.

As Steve picks up a brush, he hums, dips it into the paint and smears it across the canvas in gentle strokes. Sometimes- and only sometimes, does he know what he's painting. He likes his landscapes well enough, people, too, but often, he likes freehand, knows that it's child's play when he does it, as if he'd dipped his fingers into the paint and willed tacky into existence.

It's still a form of release, though. It may not be anything special, but it cuts his anxiety right in two when he needs it the most.

"You've been in here all day?"

Steve jumps, watches helplessly as the brush slides across the canvas in an indecent stroke only to fall out of his hand onto the floor. "Fuck," he says, climbs out of his chair, reaching for the brush. He delicately places it onto the table, the one that holds all his supplies, his brushes, his paints. He's even got clay and watercolors, colored pencils and markers he's still testing out because the texture runs different; the liquid is thinner, and Steve's determined to understand the variety. "You could've made a noise, you asshole."

“Forgive me for walking through my house.”

The tone is sharp, unexpected, and when Steve looks up, Billy’s leaning against the threshold of the door with a pinch in his brow and a curl to his lip. Steve’s not sure what’s caused it, thinks back to this morning when Billy smiled as he’d leaned over the edge of the bed to kiss Steve goodbye. Thinks maybe he could’ve left something out of place, then wonders if maybe something else has crawled up under Billy’s skin and settled there.

“Right,” he answers, not knowing what he could follow that up with. The tension is thick now, heavy and unsure, and Steve knows it’s one of those moods, the kind that isn’t deliberate because Billy’s only holding back his feelings like that’s the right thing to do.

Might have to coax it out of him, then.

Billy’s brow arches, pointed like he’s waiting for Steve to snap, and at that, he rolls his eyes, unimpressed. “You’re going to come sit down,” he starts, sees the way Billy’s eye twitches after being told what to do. “Sit. Down.” Then, he nods at the chair, turns and pulls open a few drawers until he’s sorting out a set of clean paint brushes.

When Steve turns around, he runs into a solid chest, Billy bracing his hips with the palms of his hands. He’s warm even through Steve’s clothes, a weight he’s missed all day. “Princess is getting a little too big for his britches,” Billy says, blue eyes amused as Steve attempts to wiggle free. He knows that Billy’s cornering him for a reason, for a fight, for maybe a good fuck to avoid the problem at hand, but if there’s anything Steve’s learned about Billy, it’s that his instincts to please win out every time.

“Daddy’s getting a little too serious,” he counters, tone like the edge of a knife. He smiles, makes sure Billy knows that he knows and that Steve’s only going to make him work for anything more than a deep kiss.

It takes a moment, but only that, for Billy to sigh, takes a step back, then another, until his hands are no longer on Steve. He almost looks disappointed, but Steve knows Billy’s insides burn brighter than any star, and if he can’t have his way now, he’ll certainly get it later.

Billy sits down, sort of plops into the seat with a huff like he can't believe Steve's making him do this. Really, Steve doesn't have a clue what he's intended, but he does have paints and stained hands, clean brushes and white canvases that take his mind off of the bullshit his brain conjures. Billy's never one to join Steve on his quest, complains too much about the paint fumes and that *there's no point to this if I can't draw jack, Steve*.

Billy's more of a reader anyway, the study a life of its own with the shelves extending from floor to ceiling. It's how Billy usually relaxes when he needs it, if he's not busy coaxing an orgasm out of Steve – which he very happily enjoys – but this time, Steve reaches for Billy's palm, pries his fingers open and sets a single brush in his hand.

"I trust you know what to do with it." Steve nudges Billy's fingers, closing the hold around the wooden stem of the brush. Then, he glances at the canvas from underneath his lashes, back and forth until Billy's frowning.

"You mean you're not going to give me a lap dance? I sat down for nothing?"

Try as he might, Steve can't contain his smirk, tilting his head like he's talking to a child. "You haven't earned that yet," he says, cupping the underside of Billy's jaw in a tender gesture of affection, only pulling away to grab the other chair he keeps in the corner of the room. "Show me what you got, pretty boy."

"You using my lines on me is not doing you any favors," Billy says, narrowing his eyes. He's pretty good at reading Steve – they're both good at reading each other now, but sometimes Steve still pulls one over his head, likes when Billy's games slip from his control, right into Steve's.

"Just paint, Billy." And then he waits, stares at the other man until Billy's grumbling under his breath. The brush rotates between his fingers, Steve watching as he attempts to find a comfortable grip before hovering over the paints like he's scared to touch them, like he's never seen them before.

"Weren't you working on something?" he asks, let's his arm fall

down, elbow to his knee. He glances at the paining, half of it covered in paint, the other half white, and the one lone streak that wasn't intentional. If Steve could give it one ounce of personification, it'd be the way it mocks him as it lies drying.

"Nothing's as important as you," he replies, turning his gaze away from the eye sore – though in actuality, the whole canvas is, but that's neither here nor there – to continue staring at Billy, watches the way the corner of his lips drag into a frown, realizing that there's no way around Steve's stubbornness.

Billy blinks, still doesn't look impressed and says, "You're being a brat."

Petulance is a word Steve *would* use to describe Billy sometimes, so used to snapping his fingers and people crawling on their knees for a moment of his time. His job – though more like his position – gives him that luxury, and Steve hates to admit that maybe he'd fallen for it too until he realized just how much he could bat his eyes and turn Billy into a puddle of putty. "Didn't start it, babe."

"I wasn't-"

"You *were*," Steve insists, gives a quick point to the project as if that explains it all. "So, now you're going to paint me a picture." It goes quiet then, the music in the background filling the room, the city outside rumbling as if it wasn't listening to their conversation.

"You know I can't paint, princess," Billy attempts on more time, just one moment of reprieve. Steve doesn't understand why it's so difficult to follow simple instructions, but then again, he's dealing with a man in a fortune five-hundred company who's never rolled over for anyone in his life.

Except Steve, but even then, that's not something Billy easily admits to. It isn't out of weakness, per se, and Billy loves showing him off to all his friends. As if Steve found objection in the question the first time Billy offered because he *hadn't*, but more to do with the fact that Billy and emotions have never gone hand in hand. Like pulling teeth, Steve's been on the brink of frustration too many times, knows the reason, knows Billy's past, but still doesn't wholly understand.

So, out of playing stubborn, Steve shrugs. “Does that look like a masterpiece to you?” Failure has welcomed him too many times; Steve feels like maybe that’s the root of a much larger problem. The career he’d aspired for left no room for positive affirmations, not until he’d struggled for a few years and finally booked a gig big enough to have offers roll in, but that doesn’t mean he doesn’t deal with his fair share of personal torment over whether all he’s good with his posing.

Steve likes his looks well enough, uses that to his advantage more often than he’d like to admit, but that alone isn’t fulfilling as the time spent in between painting and creating something much more than an image.

He frowns, holds disdain in his eyes because some of the colors have muddled together in a particularly ugly shade of brown. Not what he was going for, but it’s not like he can’t start again. That’d always been a lesson learned.

“You know anything you do is good enough.” Billy’s eyes are on him now, intense and blue under the streams of sun that shine through the window.

It makes Steve suck in a breath, reminds him of all the reasons he loves Billy’s attention on him. “Not the point,” he croaks, definitely not disillusioned with the idea that Billy knows how he affects Steve. “But thank you anyway. You’re stalling; now get to it or-”

“Or what?” Billy says, the arch in his brow back.

Steve plucks the brush he’d been using off the table, dips it into a shade of blue – bright like the sky and similar to Billy’s eye color; he’d never admit it, but it’s why he bought it, felt like maybe the deep reds and shades of purple he loved the most could use the contrast even though it never really matched.

He’s sure there’s a metaphor somewhere in there, hates how he’s always slow in understanding what his subconscious already knows, but Steve only dabs the canvas in the corner, knows Billy’s looking at what he’s doing, only to surprise him by lifting the brush to slide it down the side of Billy’s cheek. “That’s my favorite color on you,” he

says. "For future reference."

Billy stills, gone rigid by the gesture. The flick of his tongue is what gives him away, that he's not mad but agitated with *really? Did you really?*

"If you get paint on this suit-" he says, voice dropping low.

"You'll what?" Steve taunts. "Spank me, daddy?" And just as he says it, like a slow motion shot of a film, paint drips off Steve's brush and lands right on the lapel of Billy's suit jacket. Bright blue paint on a deep brown suit don't really go together, but Steve is reminded, if only briefly, why he loves color theory so much. "That was not planned."

He shrinks away, wide-eyed as Billy dabs the paint off with a finger, slides it across the canvas in front of him because Steve doesn't have a rag nearby, and there's no sense in it anyway. There's a dark spot on the suit, and it's going to be a bitch to remove.

"Wasn't it?" Billy rubs his thumb and forefinger together, that maybe if he does it long enough, the rest of the paint will wither away. Instead, it just leaves the tips tacky and stained like Steve's.

"No," Steve replies, dumps his brush into the dirty cup of water he keeps only in case he runs out of clean brushes. It hardly happens because Steve has enough sets that he can wash and dry a pair without waiting to use them. "You should've taken your clothes off before coming in here."

Now the tables have turned, his argument weak across the tongue. Billy certainly picks up on that with, "Is that so?"

"You know what I meant."

"Do I?"

"*Billy*," Steve whines, flush gradually fluttering across his cheeks.

"Hmm. See, that's not my name, baby. Not when you have to beg."

"Who says I'm begging?" But he's not confident in that question

either, pointed out by Billy's lazy smirk.

"Well, if you're not," he pauses, thumbing the bristles of the brush in his hand, "then I suppose you wouldn't mind if I did this." Billy then takes the paint brush and runs it straight down Steve's forehead, between his wide brown eyes and stops just as he reaches the tip of his nose.

"That's-" Steve falters, feels the cool breeze twice as much as the paint sits wet upon his skin.

"Not fair?" Billy's brows raise, amusement hidden in the corner of his eyes, significantly lighter than when he'd entered the room. It's a better look on him, as Steve takes him in, gently touching the tip of his nose, definitely checking that one line had been given to his painting and now another sits between his eyes. Billy must read his thoughts, pushes further by emphasizing his tone lighter and nowhere close to Steve's. *"Didn't start it, babe."*

He makes a split second decisions - not even that, really - by dipping his fingers directly into the yellow paint, flicking them until little dots dance across Billy's skin. "Then finish it."

It happens within seconds. One moment Steve is propped up on the edge of his chair, perfectly pleasant in sharing his space with Billy upright, and the next he's sprawled across the floor. His brush rolls across it, left to be found later, and his paints - including the canvas and the water - splash around them. It's in this moment that Steve's grateful Billy replaced the carpet with tile, but even then he winces until Billy's got four fingers - all stained with paint - running down the curve of his neck.

"Gladly," he say as he reaches forward, attaching his lips to the side of Steve's neck that isn't covered in paint. He nips, and he sucks until Steve's wriggling from beneath him. His cock fills quickly, doesn't take much when he's around Billy anyway, and he lets him know by rutting against his thigh, soft little presses until Billy reaches for his hip to hold him still. "I'm thinking," Billy says, slipping two fingers just past the waistband of Steve's sweatpants. His cock jumps, the anticipation curling in his chest, but Billy moves no further. "That I probably shouldn't let you cum."

Steve swallows a noise of disappointment. This isn't what he'd intended, had really hoped for more of a conversation of intent and resolution than Billy pinning him against the floor on the off-chance that *maybe* he'd get to come.

But now that he's here, he's shameless enough to admit his will power doesn't proceed him. "Please, *daddy*," he emphasizes this time, latching onto Billy's tie to pull him down into another heated kiss. His tongue is rough against Billy's, sliding past his teeth, tastes the cigarette smoke and mints, the cleanliness that lingers because Billy knows of nothing else.

Immediately, whatever tension was left lingering in Billy's body, simply dissipates. Steve feels the extra weight of Billy on top of him as he relaxes, as he pushes Steve's sweatpants down to expose his cock. Billy takes him in hand, rough at first with the callouses against his palm, but it's a discomfort that makes him twitch, makes him grind up into the palm of Billy's hand seeking more, seeking a release he knows will be quick.

Billy thumbs at the head of his cock, breaking away from Steve's kiss to latch onto the underside of his jaw. Blurts of pre-cum swell at the tip as Billy slowly rubs it down the length of him.

Steve always gets embarrassingly wet, generally likes to use his slick to fuck his fist, and Billy *knows* this, too, because he'd watched Steve once, made him sit on the couch in broad daylight just so he could stroke himself to orgasm with only the touch of his hand. Billy's blue, wanton eyes were the only thing he'd seen as he'd fallen over the edge.

So, this isn't an exception, not when Billy takes him fully, strokes up in one swift movement and too slow - agonizingly slow - to calm the desire in Steve, to make him wet, to make it easier. He whines low in his throat while Billy smiles against the curve of his shoulder. The linger of a kiss remains as he pulls away, stares at Steve and tells him, "Fuck my fist, princess."

There's no hesitation from Steve, doesn't crouch over the tile against his back, hard underneath the tarp, and he doesn't complain about how his pants restrict him from opening his legs wider, can't use his

feet as leverage to give a good thrust.

Instead, Steve's movements are limited, sloppy and uncoordinated. Billy's seated in desire, curled around Steve's side as he tightens his fist, releasing it a moment later only to repeat the torture of not giving enough until Steve catches his wrist, holds him there.

The corner of Billy's mouth twitches, reads Steve's eyes as they beg, until he releases Billy in the hope he'll listen. "You're awfully haughty," Billy whispers, though the thick of his voice gives away just how little control he has over it, how little he cares that Steve's pushy when usually it's the other way around. "Should let you take care of yourself."

Shaking his head, Steve licks his lips, gives a particularly enthusiastic push of his hips before he tells Billy, "I'm too much of a sight to behold."

With that, Billy squeezes around Steve's cock, thumb curving just underneath the head until Steve's hissing. Billy hums again, has a fond look on his face as he says, "You are, my darling. Watching you makes my day." And then he's shoving Steve's shirt up, releasing his length for only a second to do it, sliding his hand down, *down* until he's back stroking, quick sessions of his fist accumulating pre-cum, meeting the sharp thrusts Steve gives.

And then- then Billy's lips are lower on his skin, as his shirt bunches up against the line of his collar. Billy gives a rough command, says, "Now cum or I won't fuck you later," then licks across the bud of Steve's nipple, swirling his tongue until he gives a particularly hard bite that sends Steve's head reeling, has his cock blurting thick strips of cum across his tummy, towards his chest.

He's loud when the moan escapes, as Steve cries underneath Billy's torture, feels his toes curl, limbs shaking. Billy presses kisses across the middle of his chest, laps at the cum that's landed that far before taking Steve's other nipple into his mouth despite the fact that he's already cum. His hand is gentler now in his strokes across Steve's cock, eases him through the after affects of release and only steps off when Steve whimpers, squirms away from sensitivity.

"You're always so unfair," Steve says after he few breaths, catches how easy it is to fill his lungs after the rise of his heartbeat.

Billy smiles, rests his chin on Steve's chest lightly. The thick of his lashes make him look bashful, Steve staring down the bridge of his nose for a clear glimpse. He thinks, sometimes, how unfair it is, that all the small, pretty things about Billy always add up into one big picture of beauty, often made him wonder how he ended up here like this with a boyfriend who loved him good, fucked him good, too.

"If anything's unfair," Billy retorts, "it's the fact that you got off, and I've yet-"

"Do you want me to-"

Billy's quick to shake his head, places his cum-covered hand on Steve's shoulder, which stops him from moving. "Told you I'd fuck you later. I meant that."

"Like you also meant to snap at me?" Steve asks without a tone of regret. He slides his fingers across the back of Billy's head, sinking them into his hair, rubbing his scalp with the blunt of his fingernails in light scratches. Steve looks away then, hates to be the bitch that ruins the mood, but he *had* intended for the issue to be addressed.

Besides, Steve might've been cookie-cutter perfect for a good chunk of his life, and that might've changed after years away from home, but the one thing that hasn't left him is wanting to know the truth. *No bullshit; no lies, Billy*, he remembers telling him. *You cheat, and we're done.*

It's been years since that conversation, and they've never held each other to anything less. This is still no exception.

Billy sighs, turns his head so he's ear is pressed against Steve instead. "Shitty day at work, that's all," he says, tired seeping through the vibrato. "Shouldn't've snapped at you."

There's no reason to be mad, and Steve's not, continues to sweep his hand through Billy's curls, across the top of his head until he's pulled away the tangles, and Billy's eyes are fluttering closed.

“You do know I’m always down for a good, hard fuck if you ever need to let your frustrations out, Billy,” Steve eventually says when the silence stretches. “I’ve told you that, and I’d much prefer having my ass pounded than you angry and sniping at me.”

“Fuck, how’d I get so lucky.” Billy’s arm curls tight around Steve’s waist, warm and pliant. Steve can feel the rise and fall of his chest, maybe even feels Billy’s heart hammering away from another slight, like they’re all adding up until Steve finally penalizes him for it. He won’t; Steve will admit he’s stubborn, but he’s not scornful. Especially with Billy.

“You really did,” Steve says in agreement, lets the two of them rest there for what feels like ages, lets the music play and the paint dry and the wind breeze through the window until his back grows sore. “C’mon, babe.” He nudges Billy, almost would’ve guessed he fell asleep if it weren’t for him stirring underneath the shake of Steve’s palm. “Let’s get you into bed.”

Billy sits up, reluctantly, turning to help Steve with his pants, helps him stand. His suit is ruffled, has paint on it in random places. His hair’s a mess from Steve rucking through it, but he looks more than content, looks soft, at least, and much more like the person Steve likes to spend his time with.

Rough around the edges has always been, and will always be, Billy’s forte, but Steve enjoys this, too. Enjoys it when Billy sweeps him into his arms, presses their foreheads together, then kisses him softly. Enjoys it when Billy is sincere, when he tugs on Steve’s hand as he nudges a foot in the direction of their bedroom.

“I’ll buy you new paints,” he says absently as they walk down the hall. Steve regrets not cleaning anything, but the bed looks more than inviting, and more importantly, he knows Billy needs the sleep as he clings to Steve, hugs him from behind. Billy’s lips are delicate against his temple, hands caressing Steve’s hips.

“Good,” Steve says, finally urging Billy to untangle their limbs to sit down. Steve helps him off with his shoes, his socks, lets Billy remove the rest of his clothes until he’s in nothing but his boxers.

With his legs spread wide, Steve slots himself between Billy's thighs, lays his hand on wide shoulders. "I'll hold you to it." And then he's cupping Billy's cheek with the palm of his hand, kissing him softly because once is never enough.

Soon, Steve's balance fails him, the two of them falling into bed in the middle of the afternoon just because they have the time, just because they can, and just because Steve's missed the way Billy curls around him when they're together.